

Oral History Interview
with
DR. JOHN R. STEELMAN

Commissioner of conciliation, U.S. Conciliation Service, 1934-36, director, 1937-44; Special Assistant to the President, 1945-46; The Assistant to the President, 1946-53. Also served as Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, 1946; Chairman of the President's Scientific Research Board, 1946-47; Acting Chairman of the National Security Resources Board, 1948-50; and Acting Director of Defense Mobilization, 1952.

Washington, D.C.

January 15, 1963
by Charles T. Morrissey, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
October, 1963

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Oral History Interview
with
DR. JOHN R. STEELMAN

January 15, 1963
Washington, D.C.

by Charles T. Morrissey, Oral Historian
Harry S. Truman Library

[1]

MORRISSEY: The first question, Doctor, is why did you move back to Washington to join the Truman Administration after you left in April, 1945, is that correct? Then you came back. I think, later that year?

STEELMAN: No, I left immediately after the election of 1944. As a matter of fact, I had resigned. I'd been in the Government about ten years whereas I came to stay only one. I had resigned in July of 1944, and Secretary Perkins spoke to President Roosevelt about it and he told her to ask me to stay on until after the election, that he was going to run again and he didn't want to be bothered with replacing me at the time. So, I

[2]

agreed to stay until after the election and so my resignation, although written in July, was accepted the third or fourth of November, the next day, I believe, after the election.

MORRISSEY: Then you went to New York?

STEELMAN: Then I went to New York and was there until the following October. I had a consulting office in New York at 70 Pine Street.

MORRISSEY: That's October, 1945.

STEELMAN: Yes, in October, 1945, I came back. In the meantime, however, immediately after President Truman succeeded to the office -- pretty soon thereafter, at least -- he appointed Judge Schwollenbach as Secretary of Labor. I had known the Judge when he was a Senator and had worked with him a few times. So he called me up in New York and asked if I could come back to Washington as Under Secretary of Labor and assist him in running the department. He stated that he didn't know much about it, but of course was very loyal to the President and very fond of the President and wanted to do a good job. He asked if I could

[3]

come, and I told him "No" I just couldn't. As a matter of fact, on one or two occasions, President Roosevelt had offered me his job, but I had turned it down thinking I could do better while I was in Government where I was, as Director of the U.S Conciliation Service. So when I couldn't come down to join Judge Schwollenbach officially, he asked if I could come down and spend about thirty days helping him to go through and learn all about the various sections of his department, bureaus, etc., and then help him get it organized the way we thought it ought to be. I did that. I came down and spent about a month here with him. Then after I returned to New York, almost daily he and I were in telephone contact. He was the only one who had my telephone number in New York -- my home number. Every night or every few nights at least we would talk on the phone. I assume that he told the President that I was working with him and that he had asked me to come down, and that I said I couldn't. So anyway, sometime in October, the President's secretary called up and asked if I could come down to see the President. I believe he mentioned that Judge Schwollenbach had told him I'd been helping

[4]

him. The President said he thought perhaps I could get leave of absence from my clients for a while, if he asked me to come to the White House. In those days, I thought you had to say "yes" when the President asked you something. I found out later you don't necessarily have to. At least, everybody doesn't say "yes" to the President. But I think if I had it to do over, I would anyway. I said, yes, I'd see if I couldn't get leave of absence. He wanted me to come down for six months.

He said, in effect, that 'the war's over and everybody's leaving town and I can't get anybody to do anything, and I need your help.' I didn't know it, but he said he'd sort of had an eye on me during the war, and he knew the job I'd been doing in the labor relations field. So he wanted me to come down and help him and I told him that I was sure I could arrange it. I went back to New York and talked to my clients and told them that he wanted me for six months. One or two of them asked me, "Are you sure it's just for six months?"

And I said, "Well, that's what the man said."

So, of course, as these things usually work out, it wasn't six months, it was about six months after President Eisenhower was elected. I came down at

[5]

the request of the President and I'm not sure I'd say "yes" to just any President, but I certainly would say "yes" again to President Truman.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall meeting President Truman when he was Senator Truman and head of the Truman Committee? Was there any actual meeting between you two, or he just had his eye on you from a distance?

STEELMAN: It was certainly mostly from a distance. I had never, so far as I know, never even seen him except once. One time he was having a hearing on some subject that I was interested in and I went up to the hearing room and I saw him there. I don't believe I actually met him even then. If I did, it's the only time I ever met him. I don't believe I'd ever met him till I came to the White House to see him, but naturally I knew a lot about him and I didn't know he knew about me, but he said he did.

MORRISSEY: This is interesting that you'd come back to Washington because newspaper people at the time were commenting on how many New Dealers, or people

[6]

who had worked for the New Deal, were leaving Washington. Actually, very few New Dealers stayed on to become Fair Dealers.

STEELMAN: Well, I think that is right, but as I say, the President had naturally been interested in all phases of war production and labor disputes was a big part of it and he said he'd had an eye on me through the war and he knew I could be helpful to him.

MORRISSEY: Sam Rosenman was one of these old Roosevelt people who stayed on with Mr. Truman. Just what was his relationship with the White House staff?

STEELMAN: Well, Sam was very fond of the President and it was mutual. They got along beautifully. I've forgotten how long he stayed, but he was certainly around for a while after I came in and assisted in speechwriting and staff discussions. He was of general help rather than just a speech writer. The President, I'm sure, depended on him just as much as anybody in those early days.

MORRISSEY: What went on in these morning staff meetings with the President? What was the usual procedure?

[7]

STEELMAN: Well, we would gather around the President's desk, and he would call on each one to see if he had any problem that ought to be brought to the President's attention; and at the same time, the President might have something in mind that he thought that a particular staff member could handle. In the early days, I was Special Assistant to the President and was interested only in labor problems, but in later days -- as a matter of fact, when I first came, we weren't having regular staff meetings, as I recall it, but pretty soon, we began to have them. Later on, when I was the Assistant to the President, he always called on me last and he and I would exchange problems and files and so forth. This is a good question because it -- we may get into it later -- it was in great contrast to the way the next administration handled White House problems.

MORRISSEY: Go ahead and make the contrast; I'm interested to hear about it.

STEELMAN: When President Eisenhower was elected and I agreed to stay on with him to help in the transition period -- incidentally, I told the General right after the election,

[8]

before he took the oath he called me up from New York and asked me if I had made any plans or could I stay on.

I told him, "Yes," I had made some plans. As a matter of fact, I had gotten a friend of mine to rent me some offices in Washington and I was already paying rent. I said that I couldn't stay very long, but I'd be delighted to stay long enough to help him get started.

To go back a little, I had talked from time to time about leaving and I was on the verge of leaving because I thought I had somebody that could take my place, namely David Stowe. I was on the verge of leaving when the Korean situation came up. One morning I went into the President's office and he asked me did I meet General Bradley out in the lobby?

And I said, "Yes, Mr. President, I did."

He said, "Well, we've been talking about you."

I said, "I hope it was good."

He said, "Well, I don't know whether you'll think it is or not." He said, "We said neither one of us could quit so why should you. Consider yourself in the Army."

[9]

So we laughed and that was that. Then I stayed on and time kept passing and finally we came up pretty close to the election. At that time the President gave me what I considered some very good advice. He said, "If I were you, John, I would stay on now until the election is over, and if Mr.

Stevenson is elected, everybody would assume you could stay if you wanted to, and you can leave the day I do. But if General Eisenhower is elected, why, if I were you, I'd stay on, at least a while just to show people you can." He said, "You've been rather nonpartisan and I'm sure the General would like to have you around if you would stay and if I were you, I'd just stay a little while longer in case he's elected." And that is the way we worked it out.

Well anyway, when General Eisenhower appointed a man to take my place and I advised him to give this new man the title to start with and I'd just take some other title such as Special Assistant or something, since I wasn't staying, so when he appointed a new person with the title "The Assistant to the President," I said, "If you'll send him on down, I'll start telling him what little I know even before you take the oath."

[10]

Well, that didn't work out so well. He did come down for one day and then he went back to New York where appointments were being made and things were happening thick and fast. He never did get back except one time and he was here for just a few hours. So we really didn't get anywhere until after General Eisenhower took the oath as President. I found out almost immediately that they were not going to operate the way President Truman and I had. I explained to them that this title of mine and this position in government was a sort of a division of labor proposition. The time had come when there were so many things the President was responsible for and supposed to do that he couldn't do them all; he could supervise them, but he couldn't personally do all these things; he couldn't even see all the things perhaps, that the law said he should see. So it was a sort of division of labor. Everyday I'd take things to the President and say, in effect, "Mr. President, I think this is too important for me to decide; nobody ever voted for me; I just work around here; I think you ought to decide this."

[11]

And he would always say, "That's right, give it to me. Give me the file; let me study it over and we'll talk again." He never dodged a responsibility; He never wanted me to decide anything that I suggested he ought to decide. In the meantime, he'd say, "I've got a couple of little ones here, I'll trade you." So he'd give me something.

So the whole thing was a division of labor between the two of us, and not only that, but he never insisted that everything come over my desk. If he had, I'd be the road-block instead of him. So we would divide things out among the administrative assistants and the other staff people, but primarily he and I always were trading back and forth different problems and different files, et cetera.

Well, when I explained this to President Eisenhower and his new assistant, the President said, "That's not the way I work." He said, "You see, all I know is what I learned in the Army. I've been in it all my life and I only know how to work the way the Army does. That is to depend entirely on staff work. I want everything to come to Mr. Adams and I don't want to even hear about a problem until the staff has

[12]

worked out a solution. I want it either presented to me orally, or in a paragraph or two -- a page at most -- the problem and the proposed answer so I can say 'yes' or 'no.'"

I recall I didn't care too much if I irritated the new President, because I wasn't going to work with him anyway. I didn't know at the time how terribly sensitive the man was, but I learned it later. So, I said to him, in effect, "Mr. President, you may run the Army that way; I never thought too much about how the Army was run myself, maybe you can run the Army that way, but I am telling you, you cannot run this desk that way. The way you plan to do it, first of all, Governor Adams' desk will be a road block. He, no more than you, can read and study everything that comes to the White House. He'll be a road block. People may, for a while, blame him instead of you because things aren't being done, but finally they'll find out why and they'll get madder at you for letting him be the road block. Secondly, Governor Adams under this condition would be President, really, not you. He can get any answer from you he wants if all you know is what he tells you."

[13]

"Well," the President said, "that's not the way it works. I've worked through the staff procedure all my life and I know how to work it." And he said, "That's the only way I do know how to work and that's the way it's going to be."

So I knew right then that they were going to get in trouble sooner or later, but I couldn't persuade them to do it like the President and I.

There was another vital difference that I discussed with them. In our combination, President Truman was the politician and one of the world's best, I think, and I was not a politician; I was a professional person and the President wanted me to remain as such. I was friendly with both political parties and remained so.

Well, with the Eisenhower-Adams combine, it was just the opposite. Adams had been a politician of sorts; he'd been governor of a little state up there about the size of a county where I came from, but he'd been Governor of New Hampshire and had been in the Congress one or two sessions, so he was the politician and Eisenhower didn't even claim to be one at the time. There was that difference, but so far as how to handle the staff work and so far as how to run

[14]

the Presidency, as I saw it, there wasn't any fundamental difference, or shouldn't be, and I didn't think it could work any other way. So they tried it and I never thought they were too successful.

MORRISSEY: Could Mr. Truman depend on his staff to volunteer the type of things that he should know? That is to say, did he have a problem of staff members telling him only what they wanted to tell him? Or was he sharp enough and active enough to get around this problem?

STEELMAN: In the first place, I think in general, the staff had no particular reason for not telling him everything they knew. It was a very free and intimate give and take at all our discussions. The loyalty that he instilled in all of us, it would have been most unusual if anybody hadn't wanted to tell him everything they knew.

In the second place, however -- and here is a very vital difference between President Truman and his successor -- the successor didn't even read the newspapers in the early days, and it was generally known that he didn't read newspapers. His contacts were

[15]

very, very limited -- limited to a few big business people, and a very few staff people, whereas President Truman talked to everybody. He was all over the place; he talked to everybody, and he knew so much about all the things that were going on, that even if somebody had tried to fool him they certainly would have gotten caught very soon. I've worked for thirty days on a problem, interviewing all the cabinet officers and staff people and everybody else, and come in to tell the President about my findings and he'd up and tell me something I never heard of before. He was right on top of everything.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember any specific illustration of this type of thing?

STEELMAN: I'm not sure I could this late, but it happened all the time. He was always aware of what went on. Every night he'd take a great load of documents and memoranda home with him for his homework as he called it, and his successor didn't take anything home, didn't have anything on his desk, as a matter of fact, because he wouldn't allow anything on his desk.

[16]

MORRISSEY: President Truman was careful, would you say, to follow up the decisions he had made to make sure they were implemented?

STEELMAN: Yes, he was very good at that too.

MORRISSEY: Did the White House staff tend to push the President to approve some legislative proposals which were more liberal, let's say, than he wanted?

STEELMAN: I don't think so. Oh, there may have been instances. For example, when we were writing the State of the Union message, there would be a variety of opinions among the staff as to how far he ought to go in this, that and the other direction, but he'd listen to all of us and then tell us what to do.

MORRISSEY: Probably a better question is this: Was it difficult for members of the White House staff to look at things the way the President was, that is, maintain the Presidential viewpoint on matters and not go off on their own individual tangents and try to persuade him to see it their way?

STEELMAN: I think there was a minimum of that. Certainly

[17]

I had no difficulty in seeing things his way. He was so free in give-and-take discussions with us that I think he was much easier to understand than lots of people. I could tell just about exactly how he would react to any particular situation. I knew him that intimately. I think we all did. And of course, that's one of the great qualities of top-side leadership and top-side executive

ability. I thought President Truman was one of the best -- was the best executive officer that I've ever seen. Both before I went to the White House and during my time at the White House and even more particularly since I've left the White House, I've had dealings with many of the top executives of the land. I've had dealings with people who have a national reputation as an executive, and I've never yet found one that I would put up against him as an executive officer. He was very different in that respect, for example, from the man that he succeeded. President Roosevelt was probably the greatest politician ever produced in America, but I always thought he was one of the worst administrators. He wasn't in the league with

[18]

President Truman as an administrative officer, as an executive officer of a group of people.

MORRISSEY: One reason I asked that question is that I've read that Clark Clifford wrote the message in 1946 to Congress recommending the draft of the railroad strikers with misgivings, and I was wondering if it was frequent for staff members to be involved in a situation in which their heart really wasn't in it; they were doing things that they weren't necessarily convinced were right or they would do differently if they were in the President's position?

STEELMAN: Well, that's entirely possible. I'm not sure Clark Clifford wrote that message. Many of us worked on it. He was there, but the President felt that it had to be done and therefore we did it. After all, the President always knows some things that the rest of us don't know and he has a different responsibility from the rest of us. So once he definitely decided a course of action was necessary from his viewpoint, why, certainly I never questioned it. I might question it until he had made a decision, but not afterwards.

MORRISSEY: I've heard other people say too, that, let's

[19]

say, contrasting the manner of writing speeches when FDR was President with the way they were written when Mr. Truman was President, that Mr. Truman used more of a team approach; that is, more people would be involved in the speechwriting process.

STEELMAN: That's right, absolutely.

MORRISSEY: Some people have criticized this as saying that it didn't encourage a distinctive style. In other words, it was too bland.

STEELMAN: Well, that's not the explanation for the style, I don't believe. For the most part, we ended up by saying it the way he would say it. It was just the difference in the two men rather than the system. However, I do have the definite impression, and I think I probably got it primarily from Sam Rosenman, that in the Roosevelt regime, not that one person always did the writing, but some one person would write a particular message almost exclusively and then go over it with the President and there it would be, whereas President Truman did use the staff approach always, but we knew about how he would say it and if we didn't, when we met with him to go over it

[20]

to make a final draft, we'd find out how he wanted it said. He was personally closer to his speeches, I think, than either Roosevelt or Eisenhower. In fact, I'm sure of that.

MORRISSEY: Did the White House staff, in your opinion, anticipate long-range problems, or were the staff members mostly preoccupied with day by day decisions and not look forward, let's say, six months, nine months, or a year ahead of time in terms of diplomatic problems that might be emerging or political problems or labor problems or something like that?

STEELMAN: Any White House staff would find great difficulty in finding time to look ahead because the pressure of the moment is always there so that it is very difficult to look ahead as far as we ought to. As a matter of fact, in our regime, the President did more of that than the staff, I'm afraid. In fact, I know he did because from time to time he would remind us, "We've got to get to work on this, that or the other problem because it's coming up six months from now or next year." Whereas, the staff, as I say, usually had their nose to the grindstone trying to

[21]

solve some problem that had to be solved today.

MORRISSEY: Yes, your phrase, "the pressure of the moment," I think is very good.

STEELMAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: One thing that has intrigued me, and I think it's difficult to answer, while Mr. Truman was very concerned about getting all the information he could before he'd make a decision, in many cases he had no hesitation to ignore a lot of this advice and go ahead on his own steam and make a decision that might not quite fit the recommendations of so-called experts who supposedly would know an awful lot about it. From your vantage point, I imagine this is not only something courageous to see a man be willing to do this and go ahead and do it, but why did he do it?

STEELMAN: Well, that's again the kind of man he is. You're right. He would get all the information he could and then he had what I came to think of as an uncanny sense of reaching the right conclusion whether it's what the experts recommended or not. Time has told us that in the big things certainly, he was right.

[22]

He made many of the great decisions of our age and I'm sure he had expert advice in other directions on every one of them, for that matter. Perhaps the consensus in some of them was there, but whether or not it was, he had an uncanny way of reaching the right decision.

Now, one of the first things I learned about him and I mention it in connection with his being a great executive officer; when I came, very shortly thereafter, something came up and I've forgotten now what it was; he made some decision or some announcement late in the day and the next morning I said, "Mr. President, I think you pulled a boner last night." (I want to come back in a moment to why I spoke so frankly; don't let me forget it.)

He said, "Well, you may be right, but if I spent today reconsidering and rehashing some decision that I made yesterday, then all the decisions I've got to make today wouldn't be made at all and therefore that would be wrong." So he told me how he worked. He said, "When I make a decision, it is eternally right from there on, regardless."

The President told me that he got all the facts

[23]

he could before he made the decision and after he made it, just to consider it right because he didn't have time to go back and reconsider because he had other decisions that must be made today. I came to realize that that was a much better theory than forever rehashing. In fact, his successor taught me a lesson on that. He either didn't make a decision at all or if he did, then he often changed it the next day, and it made a lot of confusion.

So, long after President Truman had left here, some of the government officials down the line, particularly in the State Department would say to me, "Well, when President Truman was here, we knew what the policy was. It wasn't changed every day." Now, some of these foreign officers would indicate to me, "We're over in Paris and London and Frankfurt, and we get the word that this is the policy and by the time we get it over to our corresponding officials at the other side, that we're working with, why, the first thing we know, we read in the paper that it's been changed." They were just in a great state of confusion at all times. Well under President Truman that was not the case. When he made a decision that was that and he didn't change it the next day.

[24]

Well, I asked you to remind me why I spoke so frankly to the President, even though I hadn't been here very long. I said, "Mr. President, I think you pulled a boner last night."

When I came to work with the President, he indicated to me that there is a great danger of people telling him what they think he wants to hear and some of the staff, perhaps who had worked with him for years, maybe when he was a Senator, he wasn't sure that they would always tell him just what they thought. He always urged them to do so and I think they did as well as you can expect humanity to function, but he said to me, "Now, you're an outsider, so to speak; you're just here for six months, and the way you can be most helpful to me is to tell me exactly what you think and we'll understand each other."

So I felt perfectly free to tell him that I thought he pulled a boner, and he appreciated it, but that didn't mean he changed it. I won't say there haven't been times when he made decisions and changed them, but they were certainly very, very few. It was not his habit.

MORRISSEY: You mentioned the State Department a few minutes ago and that reminded me to ask you about this

[25]

matter of the pro-Arab attitude in the State Department at the time when all this trouble was before the President concerning the future of Palestine?

STEELMAN: Oh yes. Well, I recall the President saying to me, I think, halfway facetiously, but I think he halfway meant it too, "John, can you find anybody in the State Department that's for the United States?" He'd like to have somebody who was for the United States. And, of course, he worried considerably about the State Department people going abroad and just staying, and he instituted this habit of having them back here every so often to get their feet on American soil.

After he left here, one part of the State Department (I've forgotten what they call it), but they continued this policy that he had started of calling people back here every so often and they were giving them a sort of orientation course, lectures and so forth. Since we're talking for 1985, I don't mind saying it here: This official of the State Department who was responsible for this program, his name was Hoover, a Mr. Hoover, called me up one day and said, "We miss you at the White House," and he told me that

[26]

they had, I believe he said, fifty top State Department people coming in from all the free world, coming in for an orientation course and that they wanted me rather than my successor to come over, off the record, and spend half a day with them and tell them how the White House operates. I was rather reluctant to do it, but he finally persuaded me. He said, "I think if I asked your successor, he probably would be insulted." "And," he said, "even if he came, I don't think we'd get anything from him. We want you. We want you to come over and explain to these people."

Well, I went over and I found these people were all highly educated; all except one of them had a Ph.D. degree. They were from Harvard and Princeton and Yale and Columbia and all over. They had an average of twenty odd years of service in the State Department. They were the top staff people in the various embassies of the world. I assume that they practically ran the embassies because certainly in a lot of places, especially the big ones, you usually have some political appointee, anyway, as the head, and he doesn't know anything about diplomatic matters. So this top man who had been there for twenty years ran the place, really. Well, that's the kind of people

[27]

I was talking with and I would talk and tell them how the President ran his office, how we arrived at policy and so forth. It was in these discussions, the first time I met with this group, that they told me there was great confusion abroad at the time because the new President didn't make decisions and stick to them, that they never knew for sure what the policy was. They'd think it was a certain thing and the next day they'd read that it was something else. So for several years after I left the White House, I met with the State Department people. In fact, this year they begged me twice to come over and I couldn't because of my schedule, but all through the Eisenhower Administration I met with these various people who were called in from time to time and discussed with them how the White House operates.

MORRISSEY: You've written that the "threatened use of power" and I underline those words, "the threatened use of power is the President's best weapon." Could you elaborate on this? What

do you mean by it? Is this the way to get people to come to an agreement before the thing bursts out in newspaper print and the President is forced to take action perhaps against

[28]

them, that sort of thing?

STEELMAN: Well, in a democracy the threatened use of power is always better than using it. It's much better if you never have to actually do whatever it is you're threatening, and you don't even threaten except in emergencies of course. We always tried to maneuver it around to where the President didn't actually have to carry out a threat if it were a serious one that he had made against some group. I've always had a feeling that in a democracy the less use you make of power, the better it is.

MORRISSEY: Can you give any examples where this technique was successful? .Any good ones that come to mind?

STEELMAN: Well, I recall one in particular. There were many. One for example, one railroad strike we had and the President was actually up at the "Hill" delivering a message to Congress asking the Congress to give him additional powers to crack down on them and right while he was doing that I was over settling it and we got the message to the President and right in the middle of his speech or before he got to the middle, that the strike had been settled. So he thought, that was much better than having to go ahead and act on the threat.

[29]

MORRISSEY: Let me ask -- maybe you don't know the answer and it's an unfair question -- but why did Mr. Truman continue to read his speech to Congress after he'd gotten your message that the strike had been settled?

STEELMAN: I don't know except I suppose it would be an unusual thing if a President went up to give a message to the Congress, if he stopped in the middle of it. So he went ahead through with it. I assume his theory, if he had time to think about it, that at least the Congress and the nation had a right to know since he was that far with it, to know what he had on his mind to do, if necessary.

MORRISSEY: What did Mr. Truman conceive the function of the cabinet to be? To be just a symbolic group that meets, a meeting of executive department heads, or a policy-making group of the highest level? Or did he waver at different times with different ideas of what he should do with the cabinet?

STEELMAN: I'm sure that with any President there were times when the cabinet is more important than others, depending on what the problem is. Yes, the President

[30]

did use his cabinet as a top staff organization on policy. He had regular cabinet meetings and discussed -- each one could bring up any problem he had and the President would bring to his attention and to all of them, to the attention of all, the problem that he was facing. When there

was a top-level decision to be made, something very important, he would ask each cabinet officer for his feeling on it, his opinion on what ought to be done. So, I think he made much more use of the cabinet than his successor did, or his predecessor. Again, it's characteristic of him to be a good administrator.

MORRISSEY: Your function was to coordinate some of the decisions made in the cabinet?

STEELMAN: Yes, my office was an outgrowth of the old Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion which was set up under a law passed by the Congress. This position was created early in the war to take part of the load off of the President in carrying on the war. Justice Jimmy Byrnes was the first director of it and he came to be called the "Assistant President," because he did have so much power and authority. I recall the President

[31]

reminded me when he appointed me to that particular position that it was the most powerful job ever created by the Congress, the most powerful job next to the Presidency itself. Justice Vinson was over to the White House to lunch with us a few days after I took that office (he himself had held it earlier and he said to me at the table in the White House, "John, you have the most powerful office in America next to the President."

So after the war was over, and we had the reconversion program moving, I reached the conclusion that we didn't need that particular office, that the President didn't need anybody in between him and his cabinet with his own independent powers. As a matter of fact, when I recommended to the President that we abolish my office, he made some remark to the effect that, "You're the darndest bureaucrat I ever saw, recommending that your office be abolished," and he reminded me of what Justice Vinson had told us and I said, "Yes, I remember that, Mr. President. But," I said, "as a matter of fact, I've only signed one or two orders -- directives to your cabinet since I took this office, and in those instances it was by unanimous agreement

[32]

between me and all the cabinet officers involved." So, I said, "In peacetime, certainly (I'm not sure you ever needed it), but certainly in peacetime, you don't need anybody that has independent authority in the White House."

So then he said, something to this effect, "I'll sign this order abolishing your job if you'll just stay here and keep on doing the same work." He said, "You don't think the job of coordinating the executive branch of the government is over?"

And I said, "No, Mr. President, it never will be."

So he said, "Well, you just stay on then and do the same work and I'll sign this."

So my title and my position really was an outgrowth or a continuation of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion.

MORRISSEY: Was there talk at one time of your becoming a secretary to the cabinet in something of a formal sense?

STEELMAN: Well, every so often that question came up. Jim Forrestal and Clark Clifford were very vehement on this idea that we ought to have a job "Secretary to the Cabinet." Well, the President and I talked it over and we

[33]

decided that in effect, what they were talking about, I was doing anyway, but that a secretary to the cabinet, there would be a question of who does he work for, the President or the cabinet? So we decided as long as we were in the White House there wouldn't be any secretary to the cabinet, as such, regardless of what Forrestal or Clifford or anybody else thought. The President and I, just between the two of us, agreed there wouldn't be any "secretary" and we'd just let them talk. In effect, I was, among other things, the secretary to the cabinet, but I was a little more than that.

MORRISSEY: What was the relationship between the White House staff and the Council of Economic Advisers?

STEELMAN: On a day to day basis, there was no occasion to be very close, but when it came to matters with which they dealt, we were always very close to them and called them into all the meetings.

MORRISSEY: Did you call all three or did you depend on Mr. Keyserling, Mr. Nourse, or Mr. Clark -- anyone in particular?

[34]

STEELMAN: Usually we had all three in. They were in on the speechwriting and discussions of policy and so forth -- usually all three. There did come a time later on, of course, when Dr. Nourse and the other members didn't get along too well, but we always conferred with all of them. When there came to be some feeling between them, why, we always had Keyserling. He was a good writer. We always had him in to the speechwriting meetings and so forth, so I personally would very often have separate talks with Dr. Nourse to get his opinions. He wasn't always in agreement with the President; he was a little more conservative than the President; he was an older person, but I always talked to him for two reasons; to see what he had to say, and then also to keep him feeling good.

MORRISSEY: Did Mr. Truman rely heavily on the Bureau of the Budget for a lot of his help?

STEELMAN: Yes, yes. We used the Budget Bureau the same way we did the Council of Economic Advisers.

MORRISSEY: Was there anyone particular in the Budget Bureau, James Webb or Frank Pace or, to go back a

[35]

bit, Harold Smith?

STEELMAN: I've forgotten just when Harold left, but it was pretty soon after -- maybe even before I came -- but both Webb and Pace were considered a part of our White House staff and we worked very closely together.

MORRISSEY: In your Columbia memoir, there's little discussion about the steel strike of 1952 and how did your doings in the White House at that time relate to this problem? Did you try to head it off before it happened?

STEELMAN: Yes, we did. It was, in a sense, a strike against the Government rather than the companies. The companies, I think we felt they, in a sense, were shirking their responsibility. They took the easy route and said to the union, "Well, we wouldn't mind giving you a raise if the Government will let us increase prices." That then became a very serious policy because at the time, we were trying desperately to hold the line on inflation and the employers and they weren't the only ones during those days would say to the boys, "Oh, we don't mind giving you a raise, but the Government's keeping

[36]

us from it." That's one of the difficulties about price control. It takes the responsibility off of the parties and puts it right on the Government and it creates a terrific problem.

MORRISSEY: Were you involved in the President's decision to ask for the Government to seize the steel mills?

STEELMAN: Yes.

MORRISSEY: Did you advise him to do what he did or did you...?

STEELMAN: No, I was against it, but the Defense Department convinced the President that the country would absolutely sink if steel production stopped. We found out later they didn't know what they were talking about. They didn't know where how much steel was needed or whether it was available and so forth. They didn't have their facts and the decision to seize was made in absolutely good faith and with great reluctance on the part of the President, but the Defense Department just screamed so loudly and so emotionally and it later proved to be more emotion than factual, that the country would absolutely sink that he concluded he had to do it in the public interest.

[37]

MORRISSEY: How were you concerned with the President's Special Commission on Higher Education?

STEELMAN: Well, as many things the President would set up, he'd sort of turn them over to me to see that the job was done, so I believe I was chairman of it. Naturally, I didn't personally do much of the work, but I called meetings and had people to do work just as I did in the science survey that we made.

MORRISSEY: That was my next question, right here. What was your function with the President's Scientific Research Board?

STEELMAN: Yes, I worked a little more closely with that, as a matter of fact, than I did with the educational one, but I was chairman of both and it was my job to see that the job was done. We used many, many experts in and out of Government on both of them and those reports are still referred to among scientists and educators.

MORRISSEY: It seems to me that that Science report is referred to as the Steelman Report.

[38]

STEELMAN: Yes, there was considerable publicity about it, and it came to be known as that, whereas, as a matter of fact, the scientists did the work, not I. I simply coordinated it and saw that it was done.

MORRISSEY: Offhand, do you remember what scientists?

STEELMAN: No, I don't. They're all listed there. We used many, many scientists. That report was published in several languages and has been used and is still being used all around the world.

MORRISSEY: Was it intended as an answer to the Bush Report?

STEELMAN: No, certainly not in my mind and I don't think the President's. It was simply something we felt ought to be done. We saw that far ahead that science was going to be the thing in the future. I think in our first report we pointed out that "within ten years pushbutton warfare will be possible." Well, it was almost exactly ten years from the date that we wrote, that we had missiles.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about the President's veto of the National Science Foundation Bill? This

[39]

was the first one. I think it was in the 80th Congress, if my memory serves me well.

STEELMAN: No, I don't recall those facts. There was a bill that he didn't approve of and later we got one, and I've forgotten the details as to what was wrong with the first one. It wasn't what he thought we ought to have and we finally got what he thought we ought to have, and it's been a great thing.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember anything about choosing a director of the National Science Foundation once the bill was passed? Was there difficulty in getting a good scientist? A suspicion of scientists to go in the Government service? Anything like that?

STEELMAN: No, I don't remember too many of the details. I do recall that we knew this. The President knew that a scientist, the greatest scientist might not be an administrator at all and it's

difficult to find a scientist who would fit in the position as head of a great organization like that. So the President was very careful in selecting somebody that he thought could do both, be a scientist and an administrator.

[40]

He had had difficulty in other fields. Businessmen, for example. Some of the greatest businessmen are called into government and are complete failures. Others are good, but a great many of our top business executives would fail in government and we've had examples of it.

MORRISSEY: Did you have much to do with the President's patent reform efforts? He wanted to reform the patent system.

STEELMAN: Yes. Dr. Archie Palmer whom we appointed to head that up and to do the work reported to me and kept in very close touch with me throughout. In fact, he still does, and he did quite a job there in pulling a lot of information together. You see, in the patent field, just as in the science field, the Government is so big and different departments run off on different tangents and the first thing you know it's so big that one department doesn't know what the other one is doing. He pulled together our Government patent situation. Just as I say, we did in science. In our science study, for example, we would find one department doing research on a certain field and

[41]

refusing to tell the other department that was interested in the same thing what they were doing. There was inter-departmental jealousy and there was a lot of waste going on. We tried to eliminate as much of it as we could. It's the public's money and we didn't feel that two departments -- it's all right for two departments to work on the same experiment, just so they share it with each other, and don't be wasting through double efforts.

MORRISSEY: Did you have much to do with the Hoover Commission?

STEELMAN: Not a great deal. I helped the President some in selecting the members and I called the first meeting. At the President's suggestion, I maneuvered it so there was no question about ex-President Hoover being chairman. Before I called the meeting in the cabinet room, I had it fixed up with one fellow that he would nominate President Hoover as chairman and another would second the motion and that nobody else would be nominated. That was a cut and dried thing. It would have happened anyway I think, but we just assumed that President Hoover, if he was going to serve on it, ought to be the chairman. I've forgotten

[42]

but it seems to me that Secretary Forrestal nominated him and Secretary Acheson seconded it or vice versa and the first thing you know, he found himself chairman. We didn't feel that a former president should sit on a commission without being offered and urged to accept the chairmanship.

MORRISSEY: Did you have much to do with housing legislation or housing matters, in general, when you were on the White House staff?

STEELMAN: No, I never did, for some reason, have a great deal to do with that. Sometimes some of the housing officials reported to me instead of seeing the President, but generally housing problems were handled by the President and other members of the staff. It didn't particularly come through my office.

MORRISSEY: Is this true of foreign aid too, such as, oh let's say, aid to the Philippines?

STEELMAN: Yes, yes, I didn't personally have a great deal to do with that. I was in the meetings where it was discussed and so forth but I never took the lead in it.

[43]

MORRISSEY: In 1949 and 1950, you directed a Federal program to alleviate unemployment in distressed areas and we have, I think, 21 boxes of papers out at the Truman Library covering this program. This was stopped, I assume, when the Korean War began and because of defense contracts and whatnot really solved the problem.

STEELMAN: Yes, we were working desperately on it and I never felt we got very far, but it was something we had to do the best we could. It was awfully difficult, but as you say, the Korean War came along and we had other things to do and that wasn't necessary to do at the time.. Now in later years, why, it's come back and they're working on it right now and getting somewhere, but not far enough.

MORRISSEY: Was Philip McGuire associated with that program?

STEELMAN: Yes, he was one of my assistants and if I couldn't be there he chaired the meetings and he took the lead in it.

MORRISSEY: What were your relations with Stuart Symington

[44]

regarding coordination of departmental programs under the Defense Production Act of 1950? I understand there was a little difficulty there in getting everybody to cooperate so that the act could be administered.

STEELMAN: That was at the time Stuart was head of the National Security Resources Board. Yes, well, there came up quite a problem and quite a serious discussion in the early days of the Korean situation as to what the role of the National Security Resources Board would be. You see, in peacetime,, the National Security Resources Board is an arm of the President's office; the chairman was a member of the President's inner family circle, and he was concerned with stockpiling and plans and preparations for war, should it come. Now, here we suddenly found ourselves engaged in combat and the question arose: should the National Security Resources Board turn over and become an operation agency, a directing agency, or should it maintain its present function and let some other organization come in? Well, Senator Symington felt that his organization should be the one to run the Korean situation, so to speak, and finally the President

[45]

didn't agree. He brought Charles Wilson in and for quite a time there the National Security Resources Board was completely overshadowed. Mr. Wilson's organization was the one out front, so far as operating the war situation.

MORRISSEY: How did you convince Marriner Eccles to remain on the Federal Reserve Board, but not remain as chairman of that board? Did that take some persuasiveness?

STEELMAN: Yes, that was rather difficult. Mr. Eccles and Secretary Snyder weren't getting along very well and I've forgotten now the incident, but somewhere along the line I think the President got the feeling that Marriner wasn't being one-hundred per cent cooperative and perhaps, not quite a hundred percent loyal in carrying out policies. He delegated me to do the job of either firing Marriner outright, or getting him to give up the chairmanship and remain on a while. I recall inviting him over to my White House office and we talked it all over and I've forgotten just how, but somehow, I did persuade him that the best thing for him and for the Government -- for the President -- would be to do just that.

[46]

MORRISSEY: Was there a similar problem concerning Mon Wallgren and the NSRB?

STEELMAN: Well, no, not too similar. The trouble with Mon Wallgren was that Congress just wouldn't approve him. One of these typical excitements they stir up from time to time on the Hill -- there wasn't any particular reason why not, but they got all excited about it and it became more and more a matter of publicity and a big hullabaloo and so they just never would approve Mon, so there was nothing for him to do but leave.

MORRISSEY: Let me ask you this: why was Maurice Tobin chosen as Secretary of Labor?

STEELMAN: This happened just before the 1948 election. A great many people had already decided that the Republicans were going to win, and so it was a rather difficult thing to get somebody to be Secretary of Labor for a few months. The office itself had fallen somewhat in disrepute anyway, and at least the status wasn't what it should have been, I'll say, dating back even to Judge Schwellenbach. Judge Schwellenbach never had a chance as Secretary of Labor. He came in and was ill

[47]

almost from the day he arrived here. He, physically, never had a chance. .And then it was a time when big things were happening and some of them had to go to the White House anyway and while we always invited him in and he participated just the same, the limelight was on the White House, not on him, and he finally, of course, died. But particularly because of the time that we came to appoint somebody as Secretary of Labor, the President offered me the post and I turned it down; I wanted to get back to New York anyway and then I thought as long as I was here, I could do more good where I was. The President agreed with me that that was probably the case, but he just wanted me to have the opportunity to be Secretary, if I wanted it. He told the press that he had offered me the job which I was sorry about at the time because it made it a little more difficult to find somebody. But anyway, I've forgotten who suggested Mr. Tobin, but the

President asked me to check him a bit and I checked around with a number of people and found that he would be acceptable. He was well liked by both labor and industry, so I called him up and asked him if he'd take the job and he said he would. So that's the way he came

[48]

to be appointed.

MORRISSEY: Were there any other possibilities that were considered?

STEELMAN: Well, I'm sure there were, but I don't remember this late who they were.

MORRISSEY: Were you as actively involved in labor disputes when Tobin became Secretary as you were when Schwellenbach was Secretary?

STEELMAN: Yes, I think so, just about the same and the same way -- we worked together. We got along fine, but he wasn't here too long either, you know, but he did come in at a time when, at least, there was a possibility that he wouldn't be in office very long. Yet, he said to me, "If the President wants me, I'll be there." He was that type of man.

MORRISSEY: How did you handle the threatened railroad strike in 1950?

STEELMAN: We had so many, I've sort of forgotten which one that was.

[49]

MORRISSEY: Well, it was one that was threatened, and I don't think it was called; it was prevented, and I'm wondering if you recall anything about heading it off?

STEELMAN: As I say, I'm confused this late as to which -- which unions -- do you have a note there as to what unions we're talking about?

MORRISSEY: Well, I'd only have to guess and I'd prefer not to, so I'll let it go.

STEELMAN: Well, it's in the record somewhere anyway.

MORRISSEY: Why did you take on the job as Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization? Looking at the record, it seemed as if you had enough jobs to take the time of about three people when that one came along.

STEELMAN: This goes back again to the fact that President Truman was quite an administrator and also a politician. He and I had sort of an understanding that if a top position close to the White House, close to the President, came open, and the resignation was to be accepted before we had a replacement, the President would merely name me as stopgap so that there wouldn't be

[50]

a lot of pressure put on him from, here and there about somebody that probably didn't fit. It gave us a better opportunity to select the right person for that job.

MORRISSEY: Is that "Joe" Fowler you're thinking of who eventually succeeded you?

STEELMAN: Yes. I think we learned our lesson on that from Arthur Hill who was the first chairman of the National Security Resources Board. Jim Forrestal persuaded the President to name Arthur Hill as the first head of the National Security Resources Board. Well, I think in the early days, Forrestal and others probably had the idea that the NSRB was going to be an arm of the Defense Department rather than an arm of the President, but the President saw to it that that wasn't it. So here you have Arthur Hill, Republican National Committeeman from West Virginia as a member of the President's inner family circle which perhaps was embarrassing to both parties, both the President and Arthur Hill, but there was the situation. After the election, we developed this habit, that if the President had a White House job that was open and we didn't have the replacement, he'd just say, "Well,

[51]

John, I'm going to appoint you until you find somebody, or until we find somebody."

MORRISSEY: Why did you tend to de-emphasize your function with the NSRB?

STEELMAN: Well, I don't know that I did. What do you mean?

MORRISSEY: The reason I ask, I've read somewhere and I don't have it here in my notes, that you played it down as if you didn't want to make a big publicity splash.

STEELMAN: Oh yes, I did that. I tried to do that all the time anyway. There is usually enough people in high places in government that like publicity without me starting any of it. What I was trying to do really, was to see that it became an arm of the President and a part of the President's staff. So in that sense, I played it down. In other words, if I had gone out making a great big outside organization with a lot of publicity and so forth, it would have looked like it was sort of an independent agency rather than a part of the White House staff. The White House staff isn't supposed to talk a lot outside and have a lot

[52]

of publicity and so it was my general theory about White House staff, that made me play it down. I see now what you mean.

MORRISSEY: Did you ever discuss with the President the use of the Taft-Hartley Act after it was passed?

STEELMAN: Well, yes. Every time we had to use it we discussed it, of course.

MORRISSEY: Was he reluctant to use it?

STEELMAN: Yes. And the press and the public often misunderstood his reluctance to use it. They thought he was reluctant to use it because he had fought against it. The point is that it didn't fit. Senator Taft himself later admitted that for one thing, you invoke the Taft-Hartley act and

you postpone a strike while a fact-finding board is set up and the board doesn't even have authority to recommend how the strike ought to be settled or how the dispute ought to be settled. And as I say, that's one of the numerous changes that Senator Taft himself agreed ought to be made. The trouble about it, every time we'd try to change the Taft-Hartley Act, there would be as many people pulling in

[53]

one direction as another, a great many people wanting a thousand and one changes made and they'd end up by not doing anything with it. So we never got the Taft-Hartley Act in any shape that it was really useful and that's why the President was often reluctant to invoke it.

MORRISSEY: When Mr. Truman first became President, he used to appoint fact-finding boards as a response to the strikes during the reconversion period and some people have felt that this was a weak response, that he should have done more. How do you feel about that?

STEELMAN: Well, the point is, we got them settled, so that's the proof. There wasn't much more he could do or much more that he needed to do. It's simply another way of focusing public opinion on the parties and on the issues and putting a little pressure on them.

MORRISSEY: Were you involved in the choice of Robert Denham for the NLRB?

STEELMAN: Yes. In fact, I think I talked to him first. I don't recall who suggested him, but I remember talking with him and taking him into the President's office.

[54]

We felt that he was a fellow who would enforce it. You see, contrary to what the Board had been, this general counsel was pretty much an independent agent and he had a lot of power. The President said to him, "My information is that you're a man that will see that the law is carried out." The President said, "I don't believe in this law; I've fought against it; I vetoed it, but here it is and so help me as long as it's the law, I'm going to carry it out to the letter."

And Mr. Denham said, "I will do so."

Well, he did so to the point that he became very unpopular. Bob also had the type of personality that he had a habit of making enemies that he didn't really need to make. First thing you know, he was fighting with the Board and with the labor unions and with everybody else. But so far as carrying out the law, he was bent on doing it.

MORRISSEY: Were you concerned in any way with the immigration and naturalization legislation?

STEELMAN: Very little.

MORRISSEY: How about the natural gas bill which Mr. Truman

[55]

vetoed? Do you remember anything specific about that?

STEELMAN: Well, that's one of these things where you have a lot of heated discussions and it's one of the things that everybody gets on one side or the other. It was quite an issue around our place and a great deal of pressure from all kinds of sources, but the President just stood pat on it.

MORRISSEY: He was determined to veto the legislation?

STEELMAN: Yes, that's right.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember anything about internal security legislation? Or the general charges of what we call "McCarthyism?" Was there a deliberate response among White House staff members to protect themselves from this sort of thing, you know, be more prudent about getting involved in things -- getting implicated very innocently? I'm thinking too of the charges of corruption, you know, "five per center" and all that sort of thing? How does one defend oneself against charges like that?

STEELMAN: There's always something going on, of course.

[56]

I remember once Mr. Harold Stassen in one of his numerous attempts to gain publicity, I believe he was in Chicago, announced that John R. Steelman was in the White House, making decisions that affected grain prices, and that I was then gambling on the grain market; that I knew ahead when a decision was to be made that would run up the price of wheat, for example, up or down, and that I was very heavily involved in the market.

I will say this for Harold, whom I came to know -- I used to know him way back when he was a young boy Governor, he and I used to make speeches around to the Junior Chambers of Commerce when he was a youngster and I was too. So I knew Harold, and I wired him and told him that if he could find where I ever in all my life bought one bushel or sold one bushel of grain, personally or through any member of my family or through any friend of mine, that I would give him all I had, which was a box full of Government bonds that I had saved all my life. I'll say this for Harold, he wrote me a nice letter and said he'd never mention that subject again and he never did. But he had already said it and it got in the press. That's just one of the prices you pay for

[57]

being in the White House, and that went on all the time. They didn't ride me much; they were usually after General Vaughan or somebody who was more picturesque than I. But it's just part of the price you pay and the President understood it thoroughly and never held it against any of us, of course.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember anything about Newbold Morris's short tenure in Washington?

STEELMAN: Yes, yes, I remember that very well. Newbold came in, and probably with too much publicity for his own good and for the good of what he came to do, and the first thing you know, he and Mr. McGrath were in a fight and the President fired both of them. The President didn't allow that sort of thing. Now President Roosevelt would have just laughed at both of them and let them go, but President Truman didn't allow that.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any memories of Seth Richardson who came down to do some work on this internal security business, the loyalty of government employees?

STEELMAN: Well, I had a few meetings with him, or at least

[58]

I was in a few meetings where he was there. My vague memory this late is that he was a solid fellow that the President was very well satisfied with his work. He was a quiet operator, didn't go in for a lot of publicity and he was a great fellow for digging up the facts. My recollection is that the President was very well pleased with him.

MORRISSEY: In a lot of your comments you've emphasized how you think a man who is a member of the White House staff can do a more effective job if he doesn't publicize himself -- if he keeps what he knows to himself and keeps his name out of the newspapers. I would assume that you feel very strongly about this.

STEELMAN: I do. In the first place, just time alone, you cannot be in the press every day, you have to talk to all the boys that call you up about it, or they'll get mad at you. If you go in for publicity, you'll find that's about all you can do, that's one thing about it.

In the second place, if you talk, you lose your effectiveness anyway. If you talk, you have to tell them something that they don't need to know right then.

[59]

I'm not for keeping things away from the press and the President had somebody to tell the press what we were doing, but if all of us start being press agents, why, that's all we could do; we couldn't do our jobs. When I was appointed head of OWMR, I recall going in to see the President one morning and I said, "Mr. President, you know, I find I've got thirty people in the information division and I propose to fire all of them."

"Well," he said, "I don't know; I didn't know how many they had or what they do and so forth; that's up to you; you're running the place."

"Well," I said, "the only reason I haven't already done it without even asking you, Mr. President, is that I want to know if it's all right with you if Charlie Ross is my spokesman as well as yours?"

.And he said, "Well, yes, if that's the way you want it. Talk it over with Charlie."

So I went to Charlie and told him, "Here, right in the White House, here's an organization with a bunch of press agents, and I don't like it. Can't you make what announcements I want to make to the press?"

.And he said, "Well, sure."

So out went the press agents.

[60]

MORRISSEY: For the benefit of our friend in 1985 or thereafter who is going to be reading this transcript, could you recommend one or maybe more than one newspaper reporter in Washington who in your opinion is solid with his facts and reliable who was covering the White House when Mr. Truman was President?

STEELMAN: Well, there's no argument about that and would assume that anybody you'd ask that question would probably name the same fellow, and that's Eddie Folliard of the *Washington Post*. I certainly don't always agree with the *Post*, but Eddie Folliard is, in my book, the top reporter in Washington over all the years that I've been here.

MORRISSEY: Would you want to turn the question around and toss out a caveat?

STEELMAN: I would rather have Eddie write an article or a series of articles on a problem than anybody I know. He will hew to the facts and at the same time, he's able to write it so people can understand it. On the other hand, occasionally you'll run into a reporter, and I'd usually blame his boss rather than the reporter, who's trying to be sensational, who's trying to hunt headlines and so forth

[61]

Worse than the newspapers on that line, I think were some of the magazine reporters, *Time* and *Life* and *Newsweek* and so forth. The reporters for those magazines much more than the daily newspapers follow the policy line of their boss. I suppose if they didn't, they wouldn't be there. I know one woman who was working for either *Time* or *Newsweek*, I forget which now, came to me once almost with tears in her eyes and told me that she had orders from her boss to dig up something nasty on the White House and that she wasn't going to do it. If she found something nasty, she'd print it, but she wasn't going around making it up, and that she expected to be fired in the near future, which she was.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall her name or would you prefer not to say?

STEELMAN: I don't recall her name at the moment; I can see her perfectly plainly and I could look it up, but she got fired because she wouldn't write nasty stuff where there wasn't any. One reporter, and I see him around here occasionally but I'm not interested enough in him to know his name, one fellow working for *Time* magazine, wrote a story once when we were handling some coal dispute. For two or, three days

[62]

he kept calling me and I wouldn't answer him because I knew perfectly well he wouldn't print the truth if I told it to him. So the fact that he couldn't reach me for three days, he wrote me up anyway. He said the President had banished me from the White House, that nobody had seen or heard of me for a week and that evidently the President had gotten mad at me for the way I was handling the coal dispute and had sent me out of town incognito. So I said, "You can't win." Later on I met him and threatened to beat him up or sue him -- one or the other, and I hadn't made up my mind which, and he as good as told me that he had orders to write something and he couldn't get me so he just had to write something.

So these magazines, they're worse than the newspapers. They have their policy and if their policy is antes-administration, which they usually are if a Democrat is in, why, they just go around looking for dirt and if they can't find it they make it up and they print it. Well, Eddie Folliard always stuck to the facts. I don't mean he was pro us or pro anybody else. He just takes a story and writes it the way it is and presumably that's what they ought to do.

[63]

MORRISSEY: I can't think of any other questions, can you?

STEELMAN: Of course, I don't need to give Eddie his place in history; he's the one that got the "Mona Lisa" over here, you recall. So Eddie's place is made in history, anyhow, but he is one of the great news reporters of our land and has been the best in Washington for many years and I think is generally recognized. I doubt if you'd find -- if you went all through Washington asking, "Who's the outstanding reporter in Washington?" -- I doubt if anybody would name anyone but Eddie Folliard. I haven't seen Eddie in quite a long time myself. He's no close personal friend of mine and never has been, but he is the outstanding reporter around.

MORRISSEY: I can't think of any more questions for our friends in 1985. Do you have any parting comment here in 1963?

STEELMAN: Although the new Administration has been here two years, they haven't really settled down to where one can tell exactly how the White House is operating. I've often told people that I don't believe you even can develop a system of how the President and his staff will work. Just take the two administrations -- three, that I've been involved in. Mr. Roosevelt worked a certain way and therefore his staff worked a certain way. Along comes President Truman and he's a great politician and I'm not and I'm next to him in the staff and so we work a certain way. It's a division of labor; he takes some problems and I take some.

Then Eisenhower was different, not a politician himself, and not a person inclined to work very much anyway, and not inclined to mix with anybody except a few big business cronies, and so his staff works a different way. I don't believe you can map out a way that the President and his staff are going to operate. The present situation, I believe, is closer to ours than Eisenhower's but it's not like ours either. There's nobody in the White House, at least yet, who's emerged as the top staff man and that may be all right. We didn't talk much about who is top staff man when I was there. Eisenhower and Adams overdid that to such a great extent that they got into trouble with it. President Truman and I were always sensitive about that, and we didn't talk too much about who's top staff man. After all, the President's the top man and that's enough. Well now, in the

present administration, Mr. Kennedy has been President for two years, and. there's no doubt in anybody's mind that he's top man in the White House,

[65]

and that's just as it should be. I gather that he has different staff members who handle different problems and then come to him with them rather than channeling through anybody else. President Kennedy is a young man, he's very active and I gather that he keeps in personal touch with all the staff and all the problems. Now there is a danger there too because one of these days, he's very likely to slip up. He and one staff member may make a decision that turns up to be very wrong because he didn't have enough coordination; that's the possible danger as I see it in this administration. Of course, history will have to tell, but I'm fearful that the young president we now have may make some blunders because he and one other person, or he alone decides something without getting enough facts through coordination. So you see, you can overdo it, or you can underdo this business of carrying on the gravest job in the world.

MORRISSEY: Well, thank you very much, Doctor. I've enjoyed this tremendously.

STEELMAN: I've enjoyed it too. I've been away for ten years and I've been so busy I don't have time to think of these old days unless somebody like you comes along to ask me.

MORRISSEY: It's a pleasure. Thank you very much.

[66]

INDEX

Acheson, Dean, 42

Adams, Sherman, 11, 12, 13, 64

Bradley, General Omar N., 8

Budget Bureau, 34

Bush report, 38

Byrnes, James F., 30

Clark, John D., 33

Clifford, Clark, 18, 32 33

Council of Economic Advisors, 33, 34

Defense Department, 36, 50

Defense Mobilization and Reconversion, Office of, 49, 59

Defense Production Act of 1950, 44

Democracy and power, 27-28

Denham, Robert, 53-54

Eccles, Marriner, 45

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 4, 20, 64
the contacts of 14-15

decisions of, 23
the philosophy of Government of, 11-14
and Steelman, John R., 7, 9, 11-12

Fair Deal, 5-6
Federal Reserve Board 45
Folliard, Eddie, 60, 62, 63
Forrestal, James V., 32-33, 42, 50
Fowler, Joseph, 50

Hill, Arthur, 50
Hoover, Herbert, 41-42
Hoover Commission, 40-42

Immigration and naturalization act, 54
Internal security legislation, 55

Kennedy, John F., 64-65
Keyserling, Leon, 33, 34
Korea, 8, 43, 44

Labor Department, a discussion of the department needs, 46-48
Life magazine, 61

McCarthy, Senator Joseph, 55
McGrath, J. Howard, 57
McGuire, Philip, 43
Morris, Newbold, 57

National gas bill, 54
National Labor Relations Board, 53-54
National Science Foundation Bill, 38-39
National Security Resources Board, 44-45, 46, 50
 and Steelman, John R., 50-51
New Deal, 5-6
Newsweek, 61
New York, New York, 2, 3, 4, 8
Nourse, Edwin G., 33, 34

Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, 49, 59

Pace, Frank, 34, 35
Palmer, Archie, 40
Perkins, Francis, 1
Power and democracy, 27-28
President's Scientific Research Board, 37-38

Railroad, threatened strike of 1950, 48-49

Richardson, Seth, 57

Roosevelt, Franklin D., 1, 2-3, 17, 57, 64

speeches of, 19-20

and Steelman, John R., 3-4

Rosenman, Samuel, 6, 19

Ross, Charles, 59

Schwellenbach, Lewis B., 2-3, 46-47, 48

Smith, Harold, 35

Special Commission of Higher Education, 37

Stassen, Harold, 56

Steel mills, 36

Steel strike of 1952, 35-36

State Department:

and Steelman, John R., 25-27

and Truman, Harry S., 24-27

Stowe, David H., 8

Symington, Stuart, 43, 44

Stelman, John R.:

and Eisenhower, Dwight D., 7, 9, 11-12

and grain prices, 56-57

and the National Security Resources Board, 50-51

and the press, 58-61

resignation of, 1-2, 8

and Roosevelt, Franklin D., 3-4

and Schwellenbach, Lewis B., 2-3

and the State Department, 25-26

and Truman, Harry S., 5, 8, 10-11

United States Conciliation Service, as Director of, 3 Steelman report, 37-38

Taft, Senator Robert, 52

Taft-Hartley Act, 52-53

Time magazine, 61

Tobin.. Maurice, 46, 47-48

Truman, Harry S., 1, 49, 57, 64

as an administrator, 14-18

and his Cabinet, 29-30, 32-33

the numerous contacts of, 14-15

decisions of, 21-24

and the natural gas bill, 54-55

and patent reform, 40-41

speeches of, 19-20

staff meetings of, 6

and the State Department, 24-25

and Steelman, John R., 5, 8, 10-11
and the White House staff, 14
and strikes, 28-29, 52-53

Unemployment problems, 43
United States Conciliation Service, 3

Vinson, Fred, 31
Vaughan, Harry H., 57

Walgren, Senator Mon C., 46
War Mobilization and Reconversion, 30, 32
Washington, D.C., 1
Washington Post, 60
Webb, James, 34, 35
Wilson, Charles, 45